

Ex-U.S. Agents Tell of Efforts to Help Barbie

LONDON, July 5 (AP) — Former United States intelligence agents have provided new details about how they hid Klaus Barbie, the Nazi war criminal, from the French authorities and helped him flee Europe in 1951.

In interviews broadcast Monday on a BBC program, the retired agents said they helped hundreds of Nazis who were useful to the United States escape prosecution after World War II.

"We did not have any great pang of conscience," said Eugene Kolb, a former major in the United States Counterintelligence Corps, the principal American intelligence agency in Europe after World War II.

Mr. Barbie, the Gestapo chief of Lyons from 1942 to 1944, was extradited to France last February from Bolivia, where he had been living since 1951.

In the 1950's, France twice sentenced him to death in absentia for war crimes. Mr. Barbie, 69 years old, is awaiting trial on charges of torturing and killing hundreds of people and rounding up thousands more to be shipped to Nazi death camps.

Former United States agents have said American intelligence groups

hired Mr. Barbie to provide information about Communist activities in Europe and then helped him escape to Bolivia.

Mr. Kolb said on the BBC public affairs program "Panorama" that when American officials first questioned Mr. Barbie in 1947, they knew he was wanted for his Gestapo activities. But Mr. Kolb said they thought Mr. Barbie was wanted for minor crimes.

Another former intelligence officer, Ed Dobringhaus, said American agents set up Mr. Barbie and his family in the southern German town of Augsburg, complete with an office and secretary. "We went overboard to be nice to that guy," he said. "We went out drinking beer once in a while."

Earl Browning, who headed the intelligence agency's office in Frankfurt, said he saw Mr. Barbie's name on a list of agents late in 1947 and ordered him arrested. Mr. Barbie was taken to an interrogation center in Oberursel, Germany, questioned and freed a few months later, Mr. Browning said.

Mr. Barbie then went back to work for United States intelligence, and Mr. Kolb recalled him as "a very shrewd, extremely intelligent, very capable professional."

Beginning in 1949, France appealed to John McCloy, then United States High Commissioner in Germany, for word of Mr. Barbie's whereabouts. Nothing came of the requests.

In 1951 the United States decided to stop using Mr. Barbie as an agent, but Mr. Kolb said Mr. Barbie was not turned over to the French because it was felt the French intelligence agencies had been penetrated by Communist agents.

In February 1951, the BBC said, Mr. Barbie was placed in the hands of a counterintelligence agency officer, Col. James C. Milano, and taken across the border to Salzburg, Austria, in a United States Army truck.

From Salzburg, the BBC said, Mr. Barbie was sent to Genoa, Italy, where he boarded a ship for South America.

Herbert Bechtold, a German-born officer in the counterintelligence agency who became Mr. Barbie's "handler," was asked if he questioned the morality of the hiring a man like Mr. Barbie by the United States. "I am not in a position to pass judgment on that," Mr. Bechtold replied. "I was just following orders."

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